**Joint Government/Voluntary and Community Sector Forum**

**Minutes of meeting on 4 Feb 2014**

**Present:**

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| Michael Donnelly | DSD (Joint Chair) | Anne O’Reilly | NIWRN (Joint Chair) |
| Jack O’Connor | DSD | Marie Cavanagh | Gingerbread NI |
| Harry Armstrong | DSD | Chris Quinn | NI Youth Forum |
| Keith Gordon | DSD | Helen Ferguson | Carers NI |
| Elaine Downey | DSD | Lynn Carvill | Women’s Resource & Development Agency |
| Susan Hunter | DSD | Seamus McAleavey | NICVA |
| Jeff Johnston  David Savage | DOE  DENI | Lisa McElherron  John McManus | NICVA  NICVA |
| Gabrielle Kerr | DRD | Kevin Murphy | Voluntary Arts Island |
| Alasdair MacInnes  Chris Dorrian | DHSSPS  OFMDFM | Geraldine Hanna  Glenda Davies | Victim Support NI  Sandy Row Community Forum |
| Olive Matthews | DEL | Fergus Cooper | Save the Children |
| Damian Brady  Anne McConkey  Sharon Smyth  Carolyn Barr | DCAL  DOJ  DETI  DFP |  |  |

**Apologies:** Paul Holbrook DSD

Niall Heaney DARD Speakers/Observers: Nichola Creagh DOE

Cate Taggart Belfast City Council John McGinnity DFP

Colin Devine NWCN Jackie Kerr DETI

Eddie McDowell CCWA Stephen Gray NICVA

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| **Agenda Item** | **Purpose of discussion** | **Key points of discussion** | **Conclusion** | **Action** |
| 1. **Welcome and Introductions** |  | Michael Donnelly (DSD Joint Chair) welcomed all to the meeting. |  |  |
| 1. **Minutes of last meeting JF03/13 and action points** |  | The minutes of the last meeting were agreed as an accurate and true record.  **Action points from last meeting;**  All action points were cleared from the last meeting.  Michael Donnelly advised that updates relating to the Addressing Bureaucracy Project, work being undertaken by Building Change Trust, Procurement and Communications would be covered by the Agenda. |  |  |
| 1. **Briefing:  Update on Reform of Local Government** |  | Nichola Creagh (DOE) provided the following update on the Reform of Local Government.  The Local Government Bill was at Committee stage and should be completed by end of March. Work started with Councils on community planning was due be completed by March 2015. Nicola also advised that a conference on Community Planning was being arranged with Co-Operation Ireland. This is scheduled for 27 March 2014 in Dundalk.  In response to Seamus McAleavey’s (NICVA) question on community planning, Nicola outlined details of a foundation programme the Department would like Councils to work through. She advised they were working through the type of guidance they want in place and that this would go to consultation in Autumn 2014. Councils would also be asked to consider statutory partnership arrangements. This will also go to consultation in the autumn.  Lisa McElherron (NICVA) advised that Voluntary and Community organisations were considering future relationships with Councils.  Jack O’Connor (DSD) suggested a ‘key targets and objectives’ briefing for Sector organisations and for the Joint Forum and NICVA to be the means for sharing information on Reform of Local Government.  Seamus McAlreavey (NICVA) concluded the discussion advising that NICVA had arranged to meet with Council representatives to discuss local and regional support and organising working with Councils. |  | Nichola Creagh to arrange short briefing note |
| 1. **Presentation:  Addressing Bureaucracy Project** | **Prompt Payment Pilot** | Michael Donnelly delivered a presentation outlining the background and progress to date on the Addressing Bureaucracy project.  Members were advised that the project was now in the implementation stage following the publication of the report. Nineteen recommendations were either being covered by a Code of Practice, which was currently out for review, and several pilots were underway. Findings from the pilots would later be included in the Code.  Pilots underway include outcome/output approach to funding, use of grant funder database, flexibility to manage running costs to meet project aims, lead financial verification and standardisation of reporting.  In response to some concerns about the implementation of the recommendations attracting criticism at some later stage, Michael reassured members that this project had the backing of the NI Audit Office and senior officials across key Departments. He also advised that the need to address bureaucratic working practices had been driven by the Public Accounts Committee and Audit Office and that both bodies had been briefed and updated on progress.  John McGinnity (DFP) outlined his role in relation to the Prompt Payment pilot considering targets for payments. He explained concerns at setting targets for a matter that may not be a systems-based problem and asked for views on the way forward from Voluntary and Community sector representatives.  Seamus McAleavey advised that queries raised with NICVA usually related to problems where there were no particular reasons for delays to payments. He added that he believed that targets could address this.  Discussion focused on identifying the underlying causes and whether it would be appropriate to introduce a monitoring system that would, in turn, require additional processes to be put in place.  Lisa McElherron advised that NICVA was preparing to launch its latest Viewfinder Survey to Sector members and offered to include questions relating to the issues surrounding payments. |  | Secretariat to issue web link to Addressing Bureaucracy Report.  Lisa and John to prepare questions for viewfinder survey. |
| 1. **Presentation:  Financial Capability Strategy for NI.** |  | Jackie Kerr (DETI) delivered a presentation on the Financial Capability Strategy for NI, a Priority 2 Programme for Government commitment with a timeline for implementation of Spring 2015. This is an initiative involving Departments, Sector organisations, and groups such as Housing Rights, Consumer Council, Northern Bank etc. Jackie outlined the Strategy’s vision to have better informed consumers, better able to plan, manage and take responsibility for their financial affairs*.*  Questions following the presentation related to concerns about the economic situation, payday loans,    Lisa McElherron advised that NICVA had carried out research on payday loans, legal/illegal lending working and was working with John Moores University for alternatives to credit in NI.  Fergus Cooper (Save the Children) provided statistics relating to significantly higher levels of household in debt in NI compared to other regions in GB; how latest research predicted that child poverty levels in NI would reach 46% in 2020, in contrast to Government’s aim to reduce levels to 10% . Fergus expressed an interest in discussing these matters further with Jackie. |  | Ann Moore (Save the Children) to engage with Jackie Kerr on Financial Capability Strategy |
| 1. **Procurement** |  | Alastair MacInnes (DHSSPS) outlined the issues within in Department which had led to services being procured through competitive tendering. He explained that the change in direction from long-term core funding of a limited range of organisations was found to be inflexible and unresponsive. The realignment of Health Trusts from 26 to 5 had highlighted the different practices in place and that this necessitated a consolidated approach. He advised that the Health Minister’s view was for services to be commissioned but recognised that there was a need for a formal arrangement to discuss further with the Sector.  Other issues focused on the capacity for some organisations to bid in an open market, forced mergers, mission drift, the potential for the local economy to suffer if contracts are secured by private sector organisations based outside NI and, the procurement of services based on the minimum wage rather than a living wage.  Lisa McElherron said she would share the Select Committee report on Procurement and grant funding with Joint Forum members.  It was acknowledged that this was a critical issue and that ‘Procurement’ should be tabled for detailed discussion at the next Joint Forum meeting. |  | Lisa to share report with Joint Forum.  Procurement to be included as main agenda item at next Joint Forum. |
| 1. **Commitment Action Team (CAT) updates** |  | Michael Donnelly proposed a new format whereby CAT managers would meet with Joint Chairs between Joint Forum meetings to provide detailed update reports, with written and brief verbal updates delivered to members at Joint Forum. The aim was to allow for more in-depth discussion on specific items by the wider membership at Joint Forum.  This proposal was approved.  **Outcome focused approach to funding.**  Marie Cavanagh (Gingerbread) advised that Community Evaluation NI (CENI) was working in conjunction with Business Change Trust (BCT) on Inspiring Impact in NI and that a more detailed update would be delivered at the next Joint Forum meeting.  **Compliance Tool.**  Susan Hunter (DSD) advised that the Compliance Tool was currently being tested through interviews arranged with a sample of organisations affected by the development of the Regional Infrastructure Support Programme (RISP).  She reported that two organisations interviewed to date had differing views on the process but that there were similarities in comments relating to the wording of the document.  **Communications Team.**  Susan Hunter briefly outlined the range of issues relating to the topic of communications and advised that the team had decided to focus initially on fundamental problems such as developing a more efficient approach to disseminating information across public sector organisations.  She explained that, in contrast to the ‘single-site’ arrangement available to the voluntary and community sector through NICVA, government departments had their own websites, each with their own publication arrangements.  In view of the difficulties that this posed to Departmental representatives who were tasked with circulating Joint Forum information to relevant Branches the idea, proposed by NI Direct, of a single Joint Forum site located within the Voluntary and Community/DSD site had been taken forward.  She also outlined a suggestion, which was supported by some members, to the creation of a logo that would differentiate this Joint Forum from numerous other forums that existed with the same title.  Carolyn Barr (DFP) suggested that DSD host the Joint Forum site and that the Public Sector Group reps to ask their respective web editorial Board representative to support links to this site being placed on NI Direct. |  | Each Department rep to take forward with their relevant editorial team. |
| 1. **Any Other Business** | **New Head of Public Sector Engagement**  **Concordat Annual Report**  **Round Table Update from PSG** | Elaine Downey (DSD) introduced herself as the new Head of Public Sector Engagement within VCU and explained that she and her deputy, Harry Armstrong (DSD) would be engaging with Public Sector Group members on a range of matters relating to the Joint Forum.  Susan Hunter reminded members that, while the Concordat Annual Report was not due to be presented to the NI Executive until June 2014, the report would need to be signed-off at the next Joint Forum in May.  She suggested that a cut-off point be established in order to minimise the need for last minute updates as this created delays which in turn impacted on the time available for the report to be printed.  It was agreed that she would draw up an indicative timetable for presenting the report to the NI Executive before the Assembly went into recess at the end of June.  PSG members had no issues to report to Joint Forum |  | Susan to prepare timeline. |
| 1. **Date of Next Meeting** |  | The next meeting to be scheduled for May 2014. The Secretariats to arrange a date and location for the next meeting and circulate to members. |  | Date and location of next meeting to be agreed between Secretariats. |

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